

Books of The Times

Peace—It Could Be Horrible

REPORT FROM IRON MOUNTAIN ON THE POSSIBILITY AND DESIRABILITY OF PEACE. Introductory material by Leonard C. Lewin. 109 pages. Dial. \$5.

By ELIOT FREMONT-SMITH

"REPORT FROM IRON MOUNTAIN" purports to be a secret think tank report prepared between 1963 and 1966 for an anonymous high-level inter-agency Government committee by an interdisciplinary civilian Special Study Group (also anonymous) on the implications of world peace for the future stability of American society with recommendations to maximize present and future Government policy options.

The report was supposedly delivered to Leonard C. Lewin by John Doe, one of the 15 members of the Special Study Group, in an act of conscience: the report's findings are, he is said to have said, so revolutionary and far-reaching that they should be made available for public discussion.

It is, of course, a hoax—but what a hoax!—a parody so elaborate and ingenious and, in fact, so substantively original, acute, interesting and horrifying, that it will receive serious attention regardless of its origin. No one has yet admitted its true origin, and my calling it a hoax must be taken as pure assertion—though it is based, I think, on clear and ample internal evidence.

Who Did It?

There has been much speculation about the identity of the parodist: John Kenneth Galbraith has been mentioned, so have Kenneth Boulding and other known strategic thinkers, on the questionable assumption that only an insider could have done it. But, granted genius and a will, anyone moderately familiar with the published strategic studies of the Rand Corporation, Herman Kahn's Hudson Institute (It is maintained that "Iron Mountain" is near Hudson, N. Y.), etc., could have done it. My own guess is that the report is the work of Mr. Lewin himself, perhaps with some consultative aid from the editors of Monocle magazine. Not incidentally, Mr. Lewin put together the splendid collection of political satire, "A Treasury of American Political Humor" (1964), a fact that is—again, not incidentally—omitted from this book.

In any case, "Report From Iron Mountain" is a shocker. Its basic argument is that social stability is, and has always been, based on a war system; and that, contrary to the "incorrect assumption that war, as an institution, is subordinate to the social system it is believed to serve, . . . war itself is the basic social system." This is presented with intriguing reference to a variety of important economic, political, sociological, ecological, cultural and scientific "functions" of war (or the threat of war or preparedness for war).

The focus of the report, however, is on how social stability might be maintained in the unlikely but "not theoretically impossible" event that a lasting peace (with its arms race) is thrust

upon us; on how the most crucial functions of the war system could be adequately transferred to a peace system.

Pollution and Slavery

The prospect the report outlines is truly Orwellian. It includes planned but credible "threats" from an "enemy," a space research program that is deliberately costly (and not subject to open market fluctuations) and deliberately unproductive, programmed air and water pollution, computer-controlled procreation, the reintroduction of slavery and possibly of ritual-killing and genocide. Since the effectiveness of some of these methods would be severely compromised and even nullified by public awareness of their deliberate implementation, they must be kept secret.

Clearly, the report concludes, peace is not desirable, either for social stability or for the survival of the species. Yet evidence is suggested that the war system may be breaking down, willy-nilly. The report therefore explores the application of some of its findings to maintaining the war system against the possibilities of peace, should that be determined the most desirable option.

"Report From Iron Mountain" is a hoax, a biting conceptual and stylistic parody of modern, sophisticated think tank speculation. But it is a parody with a difference, more suggestive and disturbing than funny—in fact, hardly funny at all. It is ridiculous; it is also a telling and oddly lucid outline of some important theoretical problems of peace and war that have rarely been admitted to in public or in private.

End Papers

THE WOBBLIES: The Story of Syndicalism in the United States. By Patrick Renshaw. 312 pages. Doubleday. \$5.95.

The Wobblies were, of course, the Industrial Workers of the World, a labor movement that expressed native American radicalism from 1905 to 1924. What the Wobblies lacked in numbers (they organized perhaps 5 per cent of all trade unionists) they more than made up for in fervor and in a vision of what Patrick Renshaw calls "a fairer, juster, more decent life for the average wage worker." Attracting chiefly unskilled or semiskilled migrants, the I.W.W. spoke for the most exploited and alienated segment of American labor and, as such, it was widely feared. Yet its heroes, Big Bill Haywood and Joe Hill, were gentle in person, if not in oratory.

The significance of the I.W.W., to which the author—an Oxford scholar—pays special attention, was in its concept of industrial unionism, which was the basis for the success of the Committee on Industrial Organization of the nineteen-thirties. Mr. Renshaw, who did some of his research in this country, approaches the I.W.W. as a scholar, but as one with a warm heart for his subject. And it is this warmth that gives his book a quality of very readable history.

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